

Makers of Indian Literature

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Contents

Introducing Chandidas

Vaishnav songs, or lyrics (poems) as they now appear to us, are the flowers of Old Bengali poetry, and those containing the name of Chandidas are among the sweetest. It is generally accepted that much that is significant in the life and culture of the Bengali people is due to Chaitanya : his personality and his activities. He was indirectly responsible for the preservation of the name and fame of Chandidas from falling into the depth of oblivion. Krishnadas Kaviraj, the most dependable biographer of Chaitanya, younger contemporary of the master, records that during his later years Chaitanya received emotional sustenance from the songs of Jayadeva (in Sanskrit), Vidyapati (in Maithili) and Chandidas (in Bengali). Jayadeva had an all-India vogue but the other two poets were known within limited areas. Vidyapati perhaps and Chandidas surely would have been entirely forgotton like many other good writers of lyrical songs but for the stamp of Chaitanya's appreciation pressed indelibly by his best biographer.

There was no Bengali literature as such for the common man (other than an educated or literate Vaishnav) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and to no one in the earlier centuries. It was the scholars and the Vaishnav gurus and the laity who read books in Bengali; the others enjoyed only songs, long and short, and chanting of narrative verse with music accompanied at times by puppet-show or mimicry. All reading matter, except the Vaishnavite, was in Sanskrit (and some very few perhaps in Persian also).

Two of the earliest biographical poems on the life and activities of Chaitanya were the first books written in Bengali that were intended to be read, and the second of them Krishnadas's *Chaitanyacharitamrita*, had never been chanted or sung. This book exerted a tremendous influence on the Bengal Vaishnavas from the very beginning, and as it supports esoterism it was accepted and acknowledged as the supreme authority by that section of the Vaishnavs that followed the path of emotional approach (*rāgātmika-paddhati*). It was this section of the mystic Vaishnavas, who were

the precursors of the sect now loosely called the "Bāul" (literally 'mad') or "sahajiyā" (literally 'a follower of the easy path') that adopted as their oldest masters Chandidas, Vidyapati and Jayadeva, the three writers or songs on the human love of the divine lovers Krishna and Radha. The three poets were regarded as the three original gurus of the cult of the Easy Path, who were believed to have realised through their own experience the passionate love of Krishna and Radha and expressed it in their own writings. Accordingly, each was believed to have a "Radha" in his own consort. Jayadeva's Padmavati is historical although we are not sure whether she was his married wife. We have no evidence to prove or to reject the opinion that Vidyapati had liaison with Lachima the wife (?) of a patron of the poet; the only connection between the two lies in the fact that two names appear in the colophon of some of his songs. The difficulty in regard to Chandidas is that the only female name that occurs in the colophon of his songs is *Bāsalī* or *Bāśulī* another name of the emaciated, hungry goddess generally known as Cāmuṇḍā. In the traditional stories of the cult, Basuli is naturally substituted by a human female who could in esoteric tantric practice live as a companion of a human male. She was a washerwoman, but there is no agreement on the name of the woman. The stories are interesting and they are intimately connected with the poetry that has gathered under the Signature of Chandidas. They will be told later.

The orthodox Vaishnavs revered Chandidas in the same way as they did Vidyapati and Jayadeva for the reason of their good devotional songs as well as for being reverentially listened to and enjoyed by Chaitanya. There is no doubt that the orthodox Vaishnavs sang some of Chandidas's songs in private as well as in formal Kirtan sittings, but the strange fact remains that no songs bearing the signature (bhanitā) of Chandidas do appear in any anthology of Kirtan songs nor are they quoted in any other work written before the middle of the seventeenth century. But songs of Jayadeva and Vidyapati were not neglected. Does it mean that Chandidas was much nearer to sixteenth century than Vidyapati ? The songs that appear in the innumerable Sahajiya tracts and those that are collected in the early anthologies of Kirtan songs do not seem to be the production of a good poet such as Chandidas, as some of these

are cryptic cult songs of little literary merit and others bear the stamp of a mass producer of a later date. It is however more than probable that in course of the transmission through the centuries the name of 'signature' (bhanitā) of Chandidas iṇ his popular songs were replaced by that of the better known poets of the day. A reverse process seems to have taken place from the late seventeenth century when there was some attempt to put the name of Chandidas in place of the name of the real author. In the early days of lyric activity in Bengal and Mithila it was usual for a poet to write shorter songs consisting of a couplet or two lacking a signature. It is quite likely that Chandidas following suit, was responsible for a few such couplets quoted in early Vaishnav works, called in the anthologies and appearing as refrain couplets in Vaishnav and non-Vaishnav narrative poetry.

Old Bengali literature began to appear in print from the very beginning of the nineteenth century and Vaishnav texts and tracts from the middle of the second half. Small selection of Kirtan songs including a few by Vidyapati, Chandidas, Govindadas and others were printed at the cheap presses and published for the consumption of literate Vaishnav men and women of the country. The literary-minded non-Vaishnavs and the English-educated generation knew only four names: Krittivas, Kasiram, Kavikankan and Bharatchandra. Even Iswarchandra Gupta (1812-59), who was an admirer of Bharatchandra, and the song-writers that belonged to his school, had little love for Vaishnav poetry.

The earliest historical account of Bengali literature, as was then known to the educated Bengali, though meagre and insufficient, was an article in *Literary Gazette* (1830) from the pen of Kashiprasad Ghosh, an alumnus of the Hindoo College and one of the first Indian writers of English verse. There is no mention there of Vaishnav poetry nor of a Vaishnav poet. About a couple of decades later, Iswarchandra Gupta busied himself in resurrecting the life and works of poets and popular song-writers in the urban areas along the Hooghly, some well-known (like Bharatchandra and Ramprasad), some little known (like Ramji Das and Hari Thakur) that belonged to the preceding hundred years. Gupta was not uninterested in music and he was well posted in the matter of semi-folk music as well as in Kirtan songs, which had not yet lost

fashion on ceremonious sradh occasions in rich households, be they Vaishnav or not. All these he knew quite well as he came from a Vaishnav family. He thoroughly knew the style of the mystic songs of the Baul-Sahajiya, and of the Kartābhajā (literally 'a master worshipper') a mystic cult cooked from esoteric Vaishnavism with ingredients from other cults and religions including Sufiism and Christianity, an almost underground cult which found popularity in some rich Calcutta homes during the closing decade of the eighteenth century and the opening two or three decades of the nineteenth. Gupta wrote some excellent parodies of Baul and Kartā bhajā poetry. But he was silent regarding Vaishnav poets and their poetry.

The task of introducing some Vaishnav poets (including Chandidas and Vidyapati) and of some Vaishnav works in Bengali to the general reading public was left to the credit of Raja Rajendralal Mitra (1822-91), the most eminent Indian indologist of the century. He wrote a short article in Bengali appearing (1858) in the "penny magazine", *Vividhārtha-saṃgraha* edited by him, and subsidised by the Government. The title of the article was *Vaṅgabhā ṣār-Utpatti* ('Origin of the Bengali Language'). This article merely drew the attention of the lovers of native literature to the bare fact of the existence of unknown works and authors and it did nothing more. Mitra belonged to a rich Vaishnav family and his father and grandfather themselves were composers of Kirtan songs. The poets and works mentioned in the article had been known to him from his younger days. There is reason to suppose that Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the creator of modern Bengali poetry, came to appreciate Vaishnav lyrics mainly from his contact with Mitra, one of his friends and appreciative critics.

The fiirst concrete step towards a proper introduction of Vaishnav songs and their writers to the reading public in Bengal was made by Jagabandhu Bhadra, a High School teacher (later a Headmaster) and a writer of two plays who was best known to his contemporaries as the author of a sort poem in parody of Dutt's masterpiece. Bhadra published (1874, 1875) some Vaishnav songs gathered from the old anthologies of Kirtan poetry, under the titles *Mahājan-Padāvalīsamgraha* (Collection of Lyric Verses of Great Men) and *Vrajagāthā* (Lyric songs of Vraja). Bhadra's works, printed

at a rural press and published in a cheap garb, did not rouse any enthusiasm in the reading public nor drew much attention from the Vaishnav readers in as much as a better and anotated serial collection of Vaishnav poetry was published almost simultaneously by Saradacharan Mitra and Akshay Chandra Sarkar, under the title *Prācīn-kāvya-saṃgraha* (Anthology of Old Poetry). The series contained five selections, three of which were from three of the more important poets, Vidyapati, Chandidas and Govindadas. The volume on Vidyapati was the first to come out (1874). Mitra and Sarkar's collection really introduced Vaishnav poetry to the educated reader. We soon find the most eminent writers of the day including Bankimchandra Chatterji, quoting lines from Chandidas and Vidyapati. But it was left to Rabindranath Tagore, who had imbibed Jayadeva and Vaishnav poetry when he was a teenager, to demonstrate the true value of Vaishnav poetry to the modern world of literature.

Long before the foundation of Baṅgiya Sahitya Parishad (Literary Academy of Bengal) George Abraham Grierson had started an academic and critical study of old vernacular literature in some of the Indo-Aryan languages. He was interested in the Vaishnav poetry in Brajabhāṣā and Maithili. He did much to establish Vidyapati in the poet's own part of the country where he was almost entirely forgotten. The foundation of the Parishad in Calcutta (1894) gave an impetus to the collection of old Bengali works, some known but many unknown that were preserved in neglected and uncared for, manuscripts for a long time. The discovery of unknown songs of Chandidas from manuscripts recovered form all corners of Bengal and published in the journal of the Parishad generally aroused special interest. The songs that came to light in the first two decades of the twentieth century were not so good, specially in comparison with the songs that were already known. A critically minded reader now could not but conclude that there was probably another Chandidas who came later and was an indifferent writer of Kirtan and Sahajiya songs.

The Chandidas problem, that is, his multiple indentity, suddenly became accute in 1916 following the publication of a cycle of lyric songs, on the love of Radha and Krishna, based on a single manuscript discovered nine years ago at Bishnupur (Bankura) by

Basantaranjan Ray, a veteran manuscripts collector of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. The manuscript lacked the initial folium and a half as well as the final folium or folia, and there was no indication of the title of the poem anywhere in the remaining folia (2-226, with a total of twenty-two folia and a half missing in between). Ray, the discoverer of the manuscript gave it the title *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan,* edited it with meticulous care and published it with teamed introductions from some eminent scholars from the Parishad. There was an immediate reaction among scholars and lovers of old literature, and the reactions were sharp and varied. The academic antiquarians were enthusiastic : R. D. Banerji, the foremost epigraphist, deduced from a study of the script that the manuscript was copied probably in the fourteenth or at least in the early fifteenth century. H. P. Shastri, the doyen of the Bengal antiquarians, was even more enthusiastic and bold; he opined that the author or the poem antedated Jayadeva. The opposition camp which lacked stalwarts but was strong in number included the better known Vaishnav scholars and the general readers who loved Vaishnav poetry. Their objection against accepting the poem as an old, genuine work of Chandidas was mainly twofold. First, the main note of the poem running through the whole of it is frankly erotic, so much so that it is realy hard to believe that these songs had obtained approval from Chaitanya. Secondly, the language was extremely unfamiliar, almost bizarre, so much so that one despaires of trying to link the diction of the songs in *Śrikṛṣṇakīrtan* with that of the known songs of Chandidas.

The controversy between the two camps went on for some time until the leader of the opposing camp, D. C. Sen, the literary historian, gave in by including an account of the new poem in his history of literature. *Śrīkṛsṇakīrtan* was included as a text prescribed for the newly introduced M. A. course in Bengali (1919) at the University of Calcutta. In spite of their victory, however, some of the protagonists were not easy at heart; they could not suppress their doubts. There are two main points on which their claim for the antiquity of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* rests; (i) the antiquity of the script and (ii) the antiquity of the language and diction. It was known to the epigraphists all the time that the script of the manuscript is not uniform; there is a distinctly old handwriting, in which almost all

the folia are written, but there are also two other hands, one of a much later date and other still later, both of which some-times appear in the same folia that show the old hand also. It cannot, therefore, be said that the folia showing the two later hands were later additions or replacements. But their enthusiasm was strong enough to nip the doubt in the bud. There were snags in the other point too; the grammatical pattern of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* is no doubt definitely old but at the same time there were not a few scattered forms which could hardly have come into existence even in the early seventeenth century. The linguistic objections therefore are parallel with the epigraphical. But there were fewer scholars to notice the linguistic discrepancies. So it was soon all quiet. But the problems were still there. They will be taken up later.

Since the publication of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* a very large number of songs by Chandidas have been discovered in spurts. They are all from very late manuscripts. They do not concern us here.

Life and Date : Search and Research

As some of Chandidas's songs were known to Chaitanya it can be assumed that the poet cannot have belonged to a time later than the first three decades of the sixteenth century. The lower limit is probably *c* 1525, supposing that he, like Ramananda Ray—another poet whose songs pleased Chaitanya—was a contemporary of the master. The upper limit, as is now generally believed, is the middle of the fifteenth century. The "antiquity" of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* is now adduced as an evidence in support. But, as stated above, the supposed antiquity of the work still remains to be proved. At one time what seemed to be a concrete evidence was put forward. It was a quadruplet, written in the style and metre of the arithmetical verse *(Gaṇita Āryā)*, published in an obscure journal; its source was not stated:

vidhura nikaṭe basi netra pañca-vāṇa ।
nava-hu nava-hu rasa gīti parimāṇa ॥
paricaya saṅkete aṅke nijjā ।
caṇḍīdāsa rasa—kautuka kijjā ॥
(ādi vidheya rasa caṇḍīdāsa kijjā) ॥

In the following literal and rather meaningless translation the numerical equivalents of the relevant words are given in parenthesis.

'Near the moon (1) is seated of the eyes (3), the five arrows (5); from the new (9) to the new (9) rasa the songs (are) measured. The details are to be taken as symbolic in mathematical terms. Chandidas makes (this) interesting riddle. [*Var*. Chandidas (thus) mentions the primary and proper *rasa*.]'

From these lines the date of the completion of the work containing them was assumed to be 1355 Saka (=1433-34 A.D.). The main objection to this conclusion is that it rests on so many suppositions : (1) the quadruplet is genuine; (2) it is from a work or a collection of songs by Chandidas now lost; (3) the first couplet is an arithmetical formula, (4) navahū navahū are part of the formula

and (5) it gives the date of completion of a work or of its manuscript then known. There is also a minor but no less cogent argument against its authenticity; the meaning of the first couplet is entirely unclear.

Circumstantial evidence is not of much help here in pushing upward the date of Chandidas. Vidyapati was a much better known poet in Bengal in the beginning of the sixteenth century. As a matter of fact the name of Chandidas is heard only sometime after Chaitanya's renunciation of domestic life. Advaita Acarya who was like a father to Chaitanya as well as one of his most devoted devotees, was fond of Vidyapati's songs. He sang a song by Vidyapati when Chaitanya unexpectedly came to him after his adoption of *sannyas*. Vṛindavandas, the earliest biographer of Chaitanya to write in Bengali, mentions Vidyapati, Jayadeva and Kalidasa as the best known poets at the time. If fame is any standard of measure Vidyapati was senior and superior to Chandidas. We know for certain that Vidyapati of Mithila was still living in 1460 AD.

The vogue of Chandidas known in the early sixteenth century seems to have been confined to Northern Rāḍha and the contiguous area on the other side of the Ganga. There was a village near Rāmakeli, a Hindu suburb of Gaur, the capital city of the sultans of Bengal, which was famous for musical performance or puppet or plastic representation of the stories of Krishna as were then current. The name of the village was indeed appropriate : Kānāir Nāṭsāla ('Play-hall of Krishna'). Chaitanya on his first attempt to visit Mathura and Brindavan had come as far as Rāmakeli, and on his way back from there he had passed by Kanair Natsala where he had witnessed the performance of some Krishna theme or had seen puppet or plastic representation of them. One is tempted to suppose that it was here that the great master had the first opportunity of being regaled by Chandidas's songs and/or shows. In this connection I may mention here that there is another reference to Chandidas. In the *Vaiṣṇavatoṣaṇī* commentary on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa Sanatan Goswami and his nephew Jiva Goswami, who collaborated, mention Chandidas as well as two of the peculiar themes of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan*. The Goswamins while referring in their commentary to the other amorous activities of

Krishna not mentioned in the *Bhāgavata* says : *Śrījayadeva-caṇḍidāsādi-darśita-dānakhaṇḍa-naukākhaṇḍādi-līlāprakārāś ca-jñeyāh.*('It should be understood to include the various sportive activities such as Dā-nakhaṇḍa, Nāukakhaṇḍa, etc. as made to be shown by Jayadeva, Chandidas and others'.) It is significant that the Goswamins have used the word *darśita* (past participle from the causative of the root *dṛś* 'to see') instead of the expected *varṇita* ('told', 'narrated'). We should bear in mind that Jayadeva's poem is a sort of lyric play and so is Chandidas's *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* in a proper estimation. Sanatan was a minister of Husain Shah and lived at Ramakeli, and Chandidas's work may have been well known to him. There might have been some contact of Chandidas with the Sultan's court and with some of the Hindu and Muslim officers as well. One of the stories on Chandidas's death mentions that he was called to put up his show before the Sultan and his harem. The manuscript of *Śrī-kṛṣṇakīrtan* contains a few signatures of Muslim persons as well as a line or two in Persian character (not deciphered) indicating that the manuscript was once possessed and handled by some Muslim lovers of Bengali poetry.

A number of stories and anecdotes centering the name of Chandidas have been created in the later centuries. These stories fall into two main categories: (i) his unorthodox faith and his consorting with a low-caste woman and (ii) his general life and activities in some detail. Any reference to anecdotes of the first category does not appear before the end of the seventeenth century. The stories of the second category appear only from the end of the eighteenth.

The followers of mystic Vaishnavism believed that Chandidas was also a mystic Vaishnav who practised *yoga* with the assistance of a female companion who was not his wife nor one belonging to his caste. There may be some truth in it or no truth at all, but there is no way of knowing. The name, if indeed it is his personal name and not a penname, indicates that he belonged to a family of Sakti worshippers. If it is a name the poet assumed for himself (like "Sāralādāsa" of Orissa) it would justify his supposed connection with tantric worship. In the colophon of his songs in *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* the poet invariably refers to Bāsalī (=Bāsolī) the deity he was in the service of. In a few stray songs also a reference to

"Bāśulī" occurs. The fierce goddess Cāmuṇḍā is mentioned as Bāśulī or Bāsalī almost invariably in the sixteenth century texts beginning with Vrindavanadas's *Chaitanyabhagavat*. As we shall see in some of the stories involving Chandidas, Bāśulī behaves as a human being and comes to the poet as the emissary of the supreme goddess Nityā. [In this connection I may mention that "Nityā" furnishes a clue to the peculiar caste of the poet's consort. "Nityā" is echoed in the old Bengali word "neta" ('fine cloth') and modern Bengali "netā" (soiled cloth, wiping cloth'). The deity Nityā was thus easily assigned the duty of washing clothes of the gods and goddesses. In the same way Chandidas's consort *(śakti)* was a washer-woman.]

In the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* the poet regularly calls himself as "Baṛu" Chandidas. The word "Baṛu" in its normal sense in Bengali generally meant a temple servant, usually a nonbrahmin. In many of the songs known before and after the discovery of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* the poet subscribes himself as "Dvija" i.e. a brahman. In a few other poems the poet calls himself "Baṭu". "Dvija" is distinct from "Baṛu" but "Baṭu" is not, unless we take it as a Sanskritization of "Baṛu". Anyway it is difficult to identify "Dvija" Chandidas with "Baṛu" Chandidas as some scholars have done, especially in view of the fact that a poet "Dvija" Chandidas was definitely known as a distinct person in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. He was a disciple of Narottamdas.

In the older stories referring to the domestic life of Chandidas, his consort is mentioned as belonging to the washerman caste, and she is named Tārā (another name of Bāśulī but showing a comely aspect of Cāmuṇḍā). Some later versions give the name as Rāmā or Rāmī. In the latest versions however a compromise is made between the two sets of earlier versions and the name finally emerges as Rāmatārā, a very unlikely name for a Bengali woman in the centuries before the eighteenth.

In recent times, specially in the twenties and thirties of the present century when the Chandidas problem was still unsettled, a keen point of difference among the specialists was regarding the place or region the poet belonged to. Nānur (or Nānnur), a village a few miles to the east of Bolpur (Santiniketan), was generally accepted as the place where the poet's ancestral home was. The name of the

village seems to be mentioned first in *Vivartavilās*, an authoritative work for the Baul-Sahajiyas, written sometime in the second half of the eighteenth century. But the name there occurs once as "Nānur" and once as "Nānda", indicating perhaps that the real name was "Nāndur".

As a matter of fact, the village has been known to the local people as Nāduṛ which may be accepted as a later form of Nāndur if we ignore the difficulty presented by the last consonants. The name however occures as "Nānor" in some early nineteenth century documents as well as in the *Bhaktasaritāmṛta* of Jagannāthadās who belonged to North Bengal (early nineteenth century). To quote him :

pūrvadeśe āche ek nanor nāme grām ।
'There is a village called Nanor in the eastern country'.

Nānor also appears in Rennell's map of Bengal (1779).

In modern time the first account of the private life of Chandidas was given to us by Ramagati Nyayaratna in the first part of his history of the Bengali literature (*Vangabhāṣā O Sāhitya Viṣayak Prastāv*, 1873) where he says that Chandidas was brahman and lived at Nannur, a village under the police station at Sākullipur and lying in the eastern part of the district of Birbhum.

In all accounts, brief or otherwise, Chandidas is associated with the village deity Bāśulī. Nyayaratna says that in the village there was a stone image of the deity still in worship, and that it was well known that Chandidas was a devoted worshipper of the deity. But a difficulty arose when the scholars tried to verify the statement of Nyayaratna. It was clear that the image mentioned was not of the fierce deity Bāśulī but of a benevolent deity bearing a book in one of the hands. The protagonists of Nanur would not admit defeat. They tried, unconvincingly, to derive the name "Bāsalī" from "Vāgīśvarī" an appellation of Sarasvati.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries almost every village of any importance in the Raḍha region in West Bengal possessed a couple of deities, one male and the other female, who were looked upon as the presiding deities of the village. Some deities were housed in brick temples, others in thatched bungalows or in shanties and the rest under old and venerated trees. The male deity

was Dharma or Dharmaraj and the female deity Baśuli. In the subsequent centuries Dharma in many of the villages was slowly and surely being metamorphosed into Siva whereas Baśuli remained unchanged while her name almost everywhere changed into Viśālākṣī. Of the few places where the old name of the female deity remained unchanged was the village Chātnā lying a few miles off Bishnupur (Bankura). A claim by Chatna against Nanur for the honour of being the place of Chandidas's nativity and residence was seriously put forward in 1927. The "Chandidas" scholars were now in a fix in this contest between Birbhum and Bankura. Nanur has Chandidas but lack Basuli while Chatna has Basuli but no Chandidas (as yet). In spite of academic and other weightage on their side the Chatnaists could not make headaway against the Nanurians for a time in the absence of the claimant. They now tried to overcome their difficulty by producing a document of dubious origin. It was a fairly big book in verse "discovered" as a manuscript entitled *Caṇḍīdās-carit*, written by one Krishnaprasad Sen and edited by Jogeshchandra Ray, the Bhīṣma of the Bengali academicians as well as of the Chatnaist host, and published (1934) by Ramananda Chatterjee, a well-known journalist and scholar and one of the most staunch nationalists (coming from Bankura). *Caṇḍīdās-carit* aimed at fixing the biographical data of Chandidas for good and at the same time sealing up the possibility of all future controversies regarding the private life of the poet. To pacify the Nanurians it does not reject Nanur; it is shown as Chandidas's other address. Similarly the differences arising out of the different stories are all accommodated in its frame-work. The document was like a gun aimed carefully and directly at a target it could not miss. For instance the date of Chandidas's birth is noted as the day on which Feroz Shah Tughluq took the throne of his uncle whom he had managed to assassinate.

Notwithstanding all necessary cautions the gun misfired, or as we may say, it exploded. Nalinikanta Bhattasali, an esteemed historian, clearly and convincingly demonstrated that the manuscript copy of *Caṇḍīdās-carit* was a palpable forgery, a very recent concoction.

In the sixteenth century and earlier Northern Rāḍha was distinguished for having some notable seats of tantric worship, the

chief deity being Cāmuṇḍā or Basuli. One such seat was Ketugram, a village a few miles to the north of Katwa in the district of Burdwan. Here lived in the early sixteenth century a Brahman scholar and poet by the name of Chandidas. A descendant of his ninth in generation, was well known as a grammarian in the second half of the eighteenth century. He was Nrisimha Tarkapanchanan who was very proud of his ancestor and therefore paid homage to his ancestor in the closing verse of each chapter of his commentary of the verblist according to *Saṃkṣiptasāra*, a Sanskrit grammar that had been current in West Bengal since the twelfth century. According to Nrisimha, his forebear Chandidas was a "master poet" (*kavīndraḥ, kavīnāṃ raviḥ*). I was once tempted to identify him with our Chandidas. But it is difficult to identify the author of the songs of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* with a person repeatedly mentioned as a "master scholar" (*bhaṭṭācāryaśiromaṇi*) also. We do not know sure if the ancestor of Nrisimha was the same Chandidas who wrote *Bhāvacandrikā* , a poem dealing with the various aspects of Bhakti and Krishna-worship, where he possibly subscribes himself as a devotee of Chaitanya: "*srībhagavaccaraṇāmadhuvrata*—Sri-caṇḍīdāsa."

There is not even an iota of evidence proving the fact that Chandidas lived with a woman not belonging to his own caste and not married to him. But the possibility here, in the face of the strong and persistent record from hearsay, cannot be negatived. But we cannot go beyond admitting a mere possibility. The role of Basuli in this matter, however, needs to be discussed.

A song of "Chandidas" occurs in more than one Sahajiya tract, which begins with the following couplet :

nityār ādeśe   bāśuli calila
sahaj jānābār tare
bhramite bhramite   nādur (or nānda) grāmete
praveś yāiyā kare·

'On being advised by Nitya, Basuli went to preach "Sahaj". In course of her itinerary she came to and entered the village Nadur (Nanda).'

Quoting this song the author of *Vivartavilās* makes a comment. I quote in translation : '(The song quoted above deals with) the practice of the "Arrow" ("vāṇer sādhan") indicated by a great man

("mahājaner vacan"); at the advice of Nityā the goddess Yogamāyā became manifest and instructed Chandidas.'

The anecdote of Basuli coming to the poet and instructing him in esoteric yoga practice was known elsewhere and earlier in the eighteenth century. Narahari Cakravarti, a prolific Vaishnav writer of manifold activity, mentioned the fact in one of his songs in praise of Chandidas.

In the story as told by Jagannathdas in *Bhaktacaritāmṛta* Basuli manifested herself before Chandidas and dissuaded him from taking his own life on being driven out from home for being unmindful to his studies. She told him that he was destined to be a renowned poet so that he need not worry but should go home quietly. Chandidas obeyed and as he was just entering his village his eyes caught the sight of a young and handsome girl named Tārā washing clothes in a tank nearby. They fell in love at first sight and by the grace of Basuli, their union was not delayed.

Nityā (or Netā) was the friend, philosopher and guide of the goddess Basuli. (She appears in the same function in the story of Manasā.) I have previously indicated that popular etymology made Netā (from middle Bengali *neta*, Sanskrit *netra* 'fine cotton stuff') the divine washer-woman who was in charge of washing the apparel of the goddess. It is quite likely that it was Nityā (Netā) that turned herself into the lover of Chandidas (the name literally meaning 'a servant of Chandī').

Towards the end of the cycle of stories on Chandidas a brother is added to the poet's family. He is named Nakula in a Sahajiya tract and Devīdās in the Chatna version. The first name (*nakula*) reflects the lowering of the poet's prestige in his caste, and the second name in obviously modelled after "Chandidas".

In *Padakalpataru*, the biggest and best of the anthologies of Kirtan songs, compiled towards the close of the eighteenth century, are contained a few songs that indicate that Chandidas and Vidyapati met together under a banian tree somewhere on the bank of the Ganga. Scholars are generally sceptical about the truth of the matter. They, however, cannot deny the possibility of a "Chandidas" meeting a "Vidyapati", in as much as the names were borne by several poets in Bengal and Mithila. More elaborate versions of the same incident have subsequently been found in very late manuscripts.

Some Interesting Stories

Of the various stories that were spun round the name of "Chandidas" four are more particularly interesting. They are briefly told here.

First, the story as told by Mukundadas in *Siddhāntacandroday*. It indicates how the poet received inspiration for his songs.

Chandidas was a brilliant scholar who came from a good Brahman family. He had fallen in love with Tara, a lovely and enchanting girl who helped her family by washing clothes. The lovers were very careful to meet in privacy and their intimacy was not known to others. On a dark and rainy night Chandidas came out to meet Tara at an appointed spot. He waited and waited and the midnight was approaching but the girl did not turn up. She was engaged in intimate talk with a friend and was forgetful of time. Chandidas could not wait further and he ventured to approach Tara's place and stood patiently in a corner of the compound expecting her to come out any moment. It had now started to pour and Chandidas made some vague movement which alerted Tara. She asked her friend to go out and look. She went but could not notice anything as it was too dark. Tara then came out with a lamp and saw Chandidas all wet and shivering. Tara was contrite for not keeping the engagement, at the same time she scolded him for taking the hazard of coming up to her home and in such a weather. Chandidas thus reproved returned home and wrote down a song the first couplet of which is as follows :

e ghora rajani megha-ghaṭā bandhu
kemane āilā bāṭe
ānginā ra kone bandhuyā titiche
deakhiyā parāṇa phāṭe

['On such a dark night, the sky overcast, how could the lover come far away (from home).

In a corner of the ground my lover is bearing the brunt of nature. My heart sinks at the sight'.]

In a very late Sahajiya tract entitled *Sahaja-upāsanātattva* ('The Essentials of Sahaja Worship') the story is given as follows :

Chandidas was a court poet and his brother (or cousin) Nakul was an officer in the employ of the ruler of the land. Chandidas's infatuation for Rami, a low-caste girl, did not remain concealed to his patron as well as to the public.The former removed him from grace and the latter from the caste. It was not known to anyone that the washer girl Rami was favoured by a representative of Basuli. The patrons as well as the friends of the poet expected that Chandidas would soon tire of Rami and come back to the fold. But it was not to be. Chandidas's absence from the court was so keenly felt that the ruler took steps to woo him back. Nakul was sent to negotiate. Chandidas was then living in a cottage standing at a short distance the northeast of the temple of Basuli, and Rami had her own quarters at a distance of four furlongs to the south. Nakul came to visit Chandidas and found that the poet was in company and Rami was there. On seeing the visitor Rami took leave and Nakul straightway asked Chandidas to part with Rami for good and come back to home and society. Chandidas told him that Rami was more then life to him and that she possessed a high spiritual understanding. Chandidas's earnestness convinced Nakul, and he asked for spiritual guidance from Chandidas. Chandidas could not help him but he asked him to go to Rami. On arriving at Rami's place he was very much surprised to see that Chandidas was already there. Nakul was going to take the dust of the feet of Rami indicating thereby that he was ready to acknowledge her as his spiritual guru. Chandidas and Rami asked him to come for instruction at midnight. Nakul came back to the ruler and reported everything. The order of expulsion was revoked and Chandidas was re-instated in the court as well as in the society. Nakul received spiritual initiation from Chandidas and Rami as promised.

Chandidas led a party of singers and performers of his own composition and he was the leader if not the only singer in the party. He received an invitation from the Sultan at Gaur for a show at the court. The Begum (i.e. the chief wife) of the Sultan who was seated behind the slit-bamboo curtains was struck forcibly by the good looks as well as by the performance of Chandidas. She was so much moved that she could not conceal her admiration of the poet-performer from the notice of her husband. The Sultan's love

for his wife was strong enough to excuse her for her momentary lapse but he did not let go Chandidas unpunished. The punishment was extreme. Chandidas was condemned to die a cruel death : he was thrown down from the back of an elephant that crushed him to death. As he was being thrown down from the back of the elephant Chandidas addressed this verse line to Rami.:

śuna priyā rajakinī āśake hārāilām prāṇī
ebār tarābe tumi more ।

('Listen, dear Rajakini girl, I am going to die for the queen's infatuation. Now you have to save me'.)

When Rami replied, completing the couplet, it was all over.

begam sahita neha hā nātha khuyāle deha
prāṇe māila e rājā goṅāre ॥

('For love with the queen, O my dearest, you have lost your life; this heartless king has killed you.')

A slightly different sequel is found in a second version of this story. Chandidas was singing under a roofed hall and it suddenly collapsed. The poet-singer died instantly and the lady of the house who had been moonstruck wept inconsolably.

The fourth story is from *Bhaktacaritāmṛta* a collection of biographical stories and episodes on some saintly men and women of the past, compiled by Jagannathdas who belonged to North Bengal. The story follows the line of folktales :

In the east there was the village Nanur where lived a good Brahman family. The son of the house was Chandidas, a comely youth who would not pay attention to his lessons. The father did his best but could not control his son. In disgust he told his wife to serve the son ashes instead of food. A mother would not do so but a good wife also could not go wholely against the husband's wish. She served food to her son as usual with a pinch of ashes on the plate. Chandidas noticed it and asked his mother why. She told him about his father's instruction. Chandidas took it to heart and left home at once. There was the sacred park of Basuli outside the village. He came there and sat down sorrowful. He was contemplating suicide when Basuli appeared before him in person and told him not to kill himself. Chandidas replied : My parents

have driven me out from home; it is best that I should not continue living. Basuli cheered him up by giving her blessing and promised to make him famous as a poet and scholar. As advised by Basuli, Chandidas turned back homeward.

As he was just entering the village he saw a lovely girl standing nicely at the door of a cottage. She was Tārā belonging to a Rajaka (i.e. washerman) family. Chandidas was struck with her charms and fell for her heart and soul. He was feeling what Krishna must have felt when he had first seen Radha. Reaching home Chandidas at once wrote down the following song, his first inspiration of poetry.

'Ah, ah, O, O! What an eyeful! Who is this girl unequalled in good looks, who has taken possession of my heart?
I cannot hold back myself. Yet my heart is overcome and paining. My tears bleed me to death.
Patience is out of the question; the mind is dumb and forgetful; the heart is turned mad. Also, I have no heart to do anything.
What is it that I did see so unexpectedly?
I saw a beauty and my eyes and my mind remain fastened on her. Says Chandidas : By following Basuli's command I, alas, have lost my sense.'

By Basuli's grace the lovers were united, and Chandidas was soon acclaimed as an esteemed poet.

Some Scattered Songs and the Problem Hanging Thereby

No song with the name of Chandidas attached to it is quoted in any work written in the sixteenth century, nor is any such poem collected in any early anthology of Kirtan songs. We do not find any song by Chandidas that appears in any manuscript that can be assigned with some assurance to the seventeenth century. In explanation of this strange fact an assumption is made that the songs of Chandidas known among the Vaishnavs during the period were probably imitated and revised by some good writers of Kirtan songs and one process of revision was the replacement of the name of Chandidas by another. Such substitution was mostly made by Kirtan singers. It may be true for some songs or for the most of them, but

it cannot be true for all. There is a still better explanation which presumes that Chandidas like Vidyapati and other early composers of vernacular songs did not sometimes append any signature to some songs, specially the shorter ones—quadruplets and couplets. In the Vaishnav works, including the Kirtan anthologies, written in the first two centuries of Chaitanya's faith, there were current a few short songs consisting of a couplet or a quadruplet (known as) "dhruva gīta" or "dhuyā". There is no harm in supposing that the following quadruplet, which was sung by Chaitanya's friend and school fellow Mukunda on the occasion when Advaita received Chaitanya at home after his *sannyāsa*, came from the pen of Chandidas.

hā hā pranapriya sakhi kinā haila more ।
kanu prema-vise mor tanu man jare ।।
rātridine pore man soyātha nā paom ।
yāhām gele kānu pāom tāhā uṛi jāom ।।

('Ah my dearest friend, what has happened to me?
Krishna's love, a poison, is overcoming my body and soul.
My heart is on fire, day and night; there is no relief for me.
I would run flying to any place where I could meet Krishna.')

It was really unnecessary on the part of a "Chandidas" enthusiast to claim the "discovery" of a few lame and obviously spurious lines completing the song.

Some eighteenth century narrative poems not belonging strictly to Vaishnav literature, which were sung or intended to be sung, contain a few "Dhuyā" couplets which strongly remind us of the old Chandidas and *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan*. The following "Dhuya" songlets are taken from an early eighteenth century manuscript of a late seventeenth century poem on Siva written by "Kavicandra" Ramakrishna belonging to the present district of Hooghly :

tomā dekhile parān yen pāi ।
dekhā dite kata dhan cāi ।।

'On seeing you I feel as if I have got back my life.
How much would it cost to come and show (your) face?'

baṛai go ār nā āsiba eṇā pathe ।
majila mahattva mor rākhāler hāte ।।

'Barai dear, we won't come again this way.
My prestige is all gone at the behaviour of the cowherd fellow.'

buṛi bale nātiyā nāre hera ।
hāthe nidhi pāiyā kena chāṛa ।।

'The old woman said : Look here, grandson,
why do you let go a treasure that is waiting to be picked up.'

tumi ār pār rādhā rākha ।
dāṇḍāiyā bikali ār kata dekha

'You take Radha to the other bank.
How long would you stand there and enjoy (her) distress.'

Who Wrote the "Sahajiya" Songs ?

Chandidas is mentioned as a distinguigshed writer of songs and/or poetry on the love sports of Krishna by Sanatan, Jiva and Krishnadas, all belonging to the sixteenth century and all coming from a region that comprised north Rāḍha ("Uttara Rāḍha") and south Varendri before they had settled in Brindaban and wrote there. Then after the passage of about a couple of centuries, Chandidas is introduced again in literature only as a venerable practitioner of tantric Vaishnavism and writer of mystic songs directing the main directions of the path. And so was he remembered in later times. The songs (and couplets from songs) of Chandidas utilized by the writers of Sahajiya tracts are invariably either frankly esoteric or symbolic, or are capable of being interpreted as such. We have seen that the stories on the life of the poet are generally woven around some such songs. Now the question is : did the poet Chandidas, whom Chaitanya and his contemporaries appreciated, also compose the mystic and symbolic songs? The experts on Chandidas say, no. The literary merit of these songs that could be assigned to a comparatively early date is so insignificant that it is quite difficult to attribute them to the authorship of a good poet like Chandidas known through the other songs. The objection raised cannot be overruled easily, but it must also be said that there is scope for some second thoughts. The "Sahaja" (I prefer this term to "esoteric" which would not make it clearer to the general reader) practice (*upāsanā*) and "Parakiyā" ('literally, another's wife') worship (*sādhanā*) did not come into existence after the days of Chaitanya, Svarup-Damodar, Raghunathdasa and Krishnadas Kaviraj as is generally held.

It was however a development from an imposition of the Bhakti worship on tantric Mahāyāna Buddhism widely current in Bengal and in other parts of Eastern India from the eighth century or earlier. There was also an inherent element of Bhakti in Mahāyāna tantrism. This element of Mahāyāna Bhakti merged into Krishnaism and consequently the tantric Mahāyāna developed into a new

mystic Vaishnavite tantrism. This schism was gradual. Hindu tantrism had already established itself when Mahāyāna Bhakti (with some tantrism) was superimposed on Krishnaism. This happened during the life-time of Chaitanya, and it was his intense love for God that purged the neo-tantric Vaishnavism of the vestiges of filth and scum. Svarup-Damodar (Chaitanya's close friend, a musically gifted mystic who sang to the master his favourite songs including those of Chandidas), Raghunathdas (the only disciple of Svarup) and Krishnadas Kaviraj (a devoted admirer of Raghunath) are the three persons that are mainly responsible for opening up this new pathway *(paddhati, mārga)* of realization of God through pursuance of Glowing Love (*rāgānuga*) as between a man and woman in illicit love. Radha's love for Krishna is intense and unbounded, and it aptly symbolizes a soul's desire for the ultimate experience. Radha is not Krishna's wife and their liaison is socially reprehensible. A woman's love for another's husband is much more intense than for her own. Such love is known as *parakīya* ('pertaining to another'), and the practice of Bhakti along this line of thought is similarly known as "Parakīya". The idea is made clear by a Sanskrit verse which Chaitanya had sent to Sanatan when he was still serving the Sultan.

paravyasaninī nārī vyagrāpi gṛhakarmasu ।
tad evāsvādayaty antar navasaṅgarasāyanam ॥

'A woman who has set her heart on a man not her own would all the time think joyfully about the expected meeting with the lover, although she may be busily engaged in household work.'

Songs with a double meaning, one the literal sense and the other cryptic or symbolical carrying a spiritual message, are known from the earliest epoch of literary activity in Bengali. The tradition of the Caryā songs reappears in the mystic songs of Chandidas and others. There is no reason to suppose that the tradition had been lost and its reappearance in "Sahajiya" songs is a new creation or a revival after a dormancy for centuries. As a matter of fact such mystic or riddle verses, generally couplets, were common even in the early sixteenth century. Advaita Acarya was an acknowledged expert in this kind of composition.

The genuineness of a mystic song, that is the ascription of its authorship to Chandidas is therefore, to be tested *prima facie* only on internal evidence : its contents, its language, its grammar and diction. For instance some of the mystic songs carrying the signature of the poet contains the word "āśak" meaning 'love'. It is an Arabic word hardly appearing in general literature until the middle of the eighteenth century. Such a song, to be precise the version of such a song as is available to us, cannot come from the pen of a sixteenth century poet, not to say of a still earlier poet. The existence of more than one person who wrote "Sahajiya" songs in their own name or pseudonym, Chandidas, must be assumed. The identity of at least two such Chandidases is fairly clear. One was a disciple of Narottamdas and belonged to the later half of the sixteenth century and the other had another name or penname, "Taruṇīramaṇa", belonging to the late eighteenth century. The writers of "Sahajiya" tracts all mention that Narottamdas was one of the leading followers in the path of "Sahaja" or "Parakiya" practice.

The preceding masters on the path, beginning with Jayadeva and including the Goswami gurus in Brindavan, are mentioned only as decorative authorities and their connection with "Sahaja" or "Parakiya" practice is indicated only by assigning a consort to each of them. Krishnadas Kaviraj is also included among the gurus, but he has a direct connection. His *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* is considered the basic and most sacred text of the faith, and Narottamdas, one of their real gurus, was tremendously influenced by the work of Krishnadas. Narottam did not renounce home life but he did not marry and did not take any interest in his ancestral property. He lived a life of devotion, prayer and songs.

The Kirtan style of music sprang from his efforts assisted by some of his friends and associations. It was Narottam who first adopted music as one of the main courses in the Vaishnav Sādhanā. Narottam was not a Sahajiya, at least there is no evidence to suppose so except the mention by the Sahajiyas who took up music as a means of Sādhanā. Narottam may not have written any mystic song, but it is probable that he knew them. Narottam was a Kayastha but he had many devoted Brahmin disciples. One such was a Chandidas. He wrote songs, one such song being a homage to his

guru. The 'Dvija' (i.e. Brahmin) Chandidas, I suppose was the author of the older of the Sahajiya songs as well as of a fairly large number of songs on the 'Radha-Krishna' story. Narottam held a great festival on the occasion of the establishment of some images of Radha and Krishna and of Chaitanya and Nityananda, at Khetri where all the leading Vaishnavas met together. The Kirtan music took its present form on that occasion. It is mentioned that the songs of Chandidas were also sung and much appreciated. As there is no specific mention of the songs of Vidyapati here in connexion with Chandidas I feel that this Chandidas was the same as the Brahmin ("Dvija") Chandidas, Narottam's disciple.

The honorific "Dvija" in the signature in some songs of Chandidas is significant. It is contrastive to "Baṛu". The older Chandidas whose songs were known to Chaitanya, whether he used the epithet "Baṛu" or not was probably not a Brahmin. This second Chandidas was a Brahmin and to distinguish his own songs from his predecessor's he added his caste-name "Dvija" whenever the metre permitted. It is only in comparatively recent times that in some songs of "Chandidas" the unfamiliar "Baṛu" has been replaced by the familiar "Dvija" (and perhaps *vice versa*).

I quote here in translation three songs by "Dvija" Chandidas :

I

'My friends, who was it who told me the name of Shyam?[1]
Getting into the ears it has pierced my heart; I feel disturbed.
Even then the sweetness of the name seems to be
inexhaustible and my tongue goes on repeating it.
As I mutter on I lose command over myself. How can
I meet him, my friend?
If his name is charged with so much potency, I wonder
what would happen when I come in physical contact.
How can the girls of his neighbourhood hold themselves
when they have a look at him?
However I may try I cannot forget it. What can I do
to get it out of me?
Dvija Chandidas says : Girls leave their husbands and

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[1] Another name of Krishna

come freely to him.'

II

'You are a master charmer, my love.
There is no one like you to steal the heart of a helpless girl.
My home is no longer a home to me; my home is away
from home.
A stranger is now my own man, and my own people
are strangers to me
Night is but day to me and day night.
Still, beloved, I fail to understand you.
An evil fate brought me in, a flotsam tuft of moss;
there is no one to collect me close and speak a few
charitable words.
My love, if you go on tormenting me,
you may better take your stand before me, I'll
immolate myself.
Chandidas, instructed by Basuli, says :
For the sake of others can one's own become a stranger?'

III

'I saw a lake of love, I jumped in for a bath.
I had enough of it, and as I came out and turned back
to look I felt a shot of pain.
The lake looked placid, its water inviting and cool,
but sharks were swimming and my heart gave a jump.
My home mates are mean and unpleasant, they
are [as strong] as floating plants and the neighbours
have the sting of a spiked fish;
my family is a pond full of thorny nettles.
Aspersions, like water scum, are constantly thrown at me.
If I drink some after straining it,
my body, in and out, itches violently. My fate serves
only pain instead of pleasure.
Chandidas advises : Dear girl, listen to me. Pleasure and
pain are but Siamese twins;
if one seeks love for pleasure pain will surely visit her.'

In the following song there is no reference to Radha and Krishna. It may well be taken as embodying the poet's own experience, as the author of *Siddhāntacandroday* has suggested. The last line is spoken by Chandidas, the rest by his beloved :

'A dark night, this. Clouds have piled upon high.
How could he venture out?
My lover is waiting there under pouring clouds.
The sight pains me.
Unquenchable is my lover's passion for me.
He would take up all blame and could give up life.
I have no freedom; for fear of the inmates of my
house I could not come out in time.
Ah, ah, the engagement I made put him to so much trouble.
Would you feel for me and forget the trouble taken.
Chandidas says : My lover's passion is holding our lives
in jeopardy.'

The follow song, which probably was written by "Dvija" Chandidas, is quoted in *Vivartavilās* :

'Everyone talks about a *Rasika*.[1] But there is no *Rasika*
to be found.
If one ponders, calculates and concludes, he may not
find even one among a million.
O my friend. whom should I call a Rasika?
He is really *Rasika* who can mix the various spices and
produce an effect in *Rasa*.
Rasa he keeps in exquisite gold vessels and they are
placed before him.
One may drink enough of it and reach no satiety;
he would sink into it.

[1] Literally *rasika* means one who understands, enjoys or produces *rasa* (here emotional experience sublimated). In esoteric Vaishnavism *rasika* indicates a person whose total experience, spiritual and mundane, puts him above duality of any kind beyond the limits of life and death. In the Sahajiya tracts the term means a superior guru in Parakiya worship.

Day and night he imbibes the *Rasa* in cupped handfuls;
but it doubles itself as it is spent and it flows in currents
if a drop is spilled.
Chandidas says: Listen to me, O lady full of
Rasa. You are the spring of Rasa. If a *Rasika* fellow
does not find a *Rasika* mate it is a double misfortune.'

The following song contains some technical matter and is written in the cryptic manner of the Old Bengali *Caryā* songs. It is also from *Vivartavilās* :

'Desire ("kāma") and Excitation ("madana") are a couple,
and their father's father is the "Sahaja" Being.
It may be seen : it is not at a distance, but is near enough.
It is within the universe, as a painting on a board (or at heart).
It is a serpent growing on its hood a precious stone,
and the creature does forget its nature; the jewel does
not help him.
See, *gorocanā* grows in the liver of a cow,
but it has no sense of its value.
Fruits hanging on a tree may not drop even when it is
shaken at the root.
When you are overcome by sleep you may turn your eyes
toward your forehead :
it dangles at heart, and she is called the lady.
What the parrot and its mate talk about deep in the night
Chandidas recounts partially, by the grace of Basuli.'

Taruniraman seems to be one of the latest claimants to the name (and fame) of Chandidas, particularly as regards the Sahajiya songs. The latest possible date for him would be the date of the compilation of *Siddhāntacandroday*, that is, the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan

The *Śṛīkṛsṇakīrtan*, in the slightly mutilated form before us, is a string of some 418 dialogue and monologue lyric songs presenting the whole gamut of Krishna's love for Radha, that is, his taking an interest in the girl perhaps older in age and related to him as an aunt, his full conquest and finally leaving her unceremoniously. It is totally unlike the narrative poem known as *Kṛṣṇamaṅgal*, which consists of long narrative passages ("payār") interlocked with short lyric passages or songs ("ś́ikaḷi" or "nācāṛi"). In the *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan*, lyric dialogue and monologue songs and the connecting link in Sanskrit verses, which may not always be necessary for the reader, must have been so devised originally as, I presume, was required in its perfomance as a dramatic lyric or as a lyric accompanying a puppet show, is modelled in the same manner as the lyric plays or Sankardev in Old Assamese. The Sanskrit slokas testify to their author's competence and skill.

The story and the songs are arranged in sections called "khaṇḍa" (literally 'a lump of candy') as in some of the late Purāṇas (had it been a proper play the sections would have been called "Aṅka" or Acts) but it is really strange that the last section, the biggest and the best, is not called a "*khaṇḍa*" or anything. Was it once an independent work? It may be mentioned here in passing that this last section, called *Rādhā-Viraha* ('Radha's Separation'), was a well-known category of songs on Krishna and Radha in the early sixteenth century and that the songs of this section of *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan* come nearest to the best of the previously known poems of Chandidas.

The first folium is missing; apparently the missing portion contained the invocation and valediction. The story starts with the distress of the gods on account of the Earth being oppressed by Kaṃsa, a demon incarnate. The gods came to Vishnu and induced him to be born as a man and annihilate Kaṃsa. Vishnu agreed. Here ends the first section ("Janmakhaṇḍa").

The theme proper starts with Krishna's old grand-aunt Baṛayi

who chaperoned the young Radha from her home in Gokul to the market town Mathura where she carried a daily supply of milk and milk product. So it happened that on a day the old woman was feeling tired but the girl did not notice it and pushed on. The two were separated by a distance and the girl lost her way. Baṛayi was anxiouly looking for Radha when she met Krishna and asked him whether he had see Radha on the way to Mathura. Krishna feigned ignorance of Radha and asked for detailed description of the lady so that he could know whether he had met her or not. Baṛayi gave an enthusiastic account of the charming girl. The description strictly follows the lines of traditional prescription in poetics.The description of the grace and youthfulness of Radha fired Krishna's imagination and he longed to get her. He asked Baṛayi to help him in the matter. She readily agreed to act as a go-between, and taking some flowers and prepared betels as presents from Krishna, she came up to Radha and delivered to her the message from Krishna. Radha felt extremely insulted. She angrily threw away the presents from Krishna and spoke her mind to the evil-hearted old woman who was there to protect her. The old woman, baffled and chagrined came to Krishna and reported her failure. Krishna misunderstood Radha thinking that her displeasure was for the trifling nature of the presents. He then sent back Baṛayi once again with more substantial presents including a fine sari.

Baṛayi came and sat by the girl, spoke a little, placed the things before Radha, and, with her face averted, giggled nervously.

'(Radha) : Where from are these camphored betels? Wherefrom this fine piece of sari, Baṛayi ? Who has sent me these flowers ?

'(Baṛayi) : Come, Radha, I'll tell you of Krishna's pitiful condition. He is suffering from burning love. He humbly reports to you his pitiful condition.

'As soon as the heard it the lovely girl slapped herself (in disgust and kicked at the things sent by Krishna.

'Baṛayi got up and spoke to Radha : You ought not to have done this. The son of Nanda is universally loved, and his life now hangs on your pleasure.

'(Radha) : There is my husband who lives at home, a hand-

some stalwart. How can there be love between me and a cowkeeper from the house of Nanda?

'(Baṛayi) : He is God incarnate who, remembered, requites sin and brings emancipation. If one makes love to such a being one would have permanent residence in the heaven of Vishnu.

'(Radha) : Fie to the looks and limbs of a girl! Her husband may better drown himself in a lake, if her residence in the heaven of Vishnu depends on her making love to a man not her husband.

'(She) losing her wits thus rejected the good son of Nanda. the prince of Lovers.

'Touching the feet of Basuli with his head Baru Chandidas (so) sings.'

There seems to be a lacuna in the text here. Baṛayi must have put further plea on behalf of Krishna and told her that Krishna was a bully and would not easily let Radha go. Radha understood the hint and she spoke in a mollified tone. She said she had not yet attained puberty and as such making love to a rough lover would be extremely hazardous. Krishna could wait for a few years. She promised to be available to him when quite mature. Baṛayi came back to Krishna and made a faithful report.

Krishna dreamt at night that he was in bed with Radha. His desire therefore was now overwhelming; he felt hot and feverish. On the morning he again sent Baṛayi with some valuable presents and with the message that a single meeting would be enough. The advocacy of the old woman exasperated Radha. She scolded her for playing a double role and gave a smart slap on her face. Baṛayi was taken aback at Radha's unexpected behaviour. She came back, reported to Krishna and insisted on his taking revenge on Radha. Krishna readily agreed.

Krishna assumed the role of road tax-collector one day and took his station under a Kadambo tree on the high-way from Brindaban to Mathura and kept watch. When the Gopa maidens including Baṛayi and Radha carrying their wares for sale at Mathura came up. Krishna stopped them and demanded tax. Baṛayi made a show of resistance, but Radha was stout in opposition. The other girls

slipped away during the protracted wrangling. Radha threatened to lodge a complaint to Kamsa who was a strict ruler. Krishna proposed. Radha appealed to his good sense and cited scriptures, but Krishna did not care, he said he was above law and morality. Baffled and deflated Radha turned to the old woman and said acidly : "Why do you pay heed to him and act as an intermediary? You were directed by my mother-in-law to guard me. Is such conduct on your part compatible? Krishna is a keeper of cattle and a bully. Why do you listen to him? Why don't you go to him if you want to make love? If you still have some consideration for me you must shut your ears to Krishna. Let us quietly stand by (and watch)."

But there was no peace for her. Krishna was ready to apply physical force. Radha felt there was no escape for her, and her concern now was how to explain the delay and for her rumpled hair and garb, to her people at home. She said to Baṛayi : "You still insist on this vile course, and I do not find any escape from the trap. My husband will turn me away from home if and when he comes to know of this. I am sure you will then side up with them and I shall remain alone to receive the blame. I now understand that you had bad intentions when you took a short cut through the deep forest. You, old woman, would talk away and slip out of it, but what course will be left for me then? Krishna would snatch away my seven-chain necklace. How would my husband, now at home, take it? Why did you take this path? On some false promise or pretext let us give the slip to Krishna. If we escape from him this time and go home safely we will never again come to Mathura. I am in a pretty hazard while you, a grand-aunt, are there as my chaperon. It is a great shame as you ponder and understand."

Krishna feigned inattention to allow them to slip away as if unnoticed. His intention was to separate Radha from her chaperon and get her all alone. That purpose was presently achieved with the connivance of the old woman. Radha still wrangled but finally taking it to be a providential act she submitted to Krishna's lust. She said : "Whenever I go to market at Mathura you keeping me in sight follow all the way. I know now it is a decree of fate. Never forsake me, O son of Nanda. I would go to bed with you if you promise never to go against my wishes. Krishna, be careful that my

tiara is not broken, I entreat you humbly. See that my seven-chain necklace is not torn and my other jewels are undamaged. Do not press your teeth so hard on my lip. My friends are bound to notice it. Do not prick nails on my breasts; if it is seen my husband will kill me." Radha was still rebellious against the final submission, which was brought about only after Krishna had taken away all her trinkets. These were not returned but were kept probably as securities for a second meeting.

It was late when the old woman took Radha home and her mother-in-law was told that they had encountered a robber who took away the ornaments Radha was wearing. Radha's mother-in-law stopped her going to Mathura.

The hot summer days are now gone and cloudy days are on. Krishna could not meet Radha for a second time and he was impatient. He called on Baṛayi and asked for help. The old woman could not offer any. She asked Krishna to tap his own resources. Krishna suggested Radha should somehow be made to resume her daily visit to the market at Mathura. Baṛayi approved it and added that as the rainy season was in, Radha may be induced to make a part of the journey in a boat. In the meantime Krishna would have a boat of his own to ply between Brindaban and Mathura. Krishna gladly endorsed the scheme and in no time had his boat ready to ply the ferry. It was not at all difficult for Baṛayi to make Radha's people see reason and agree. But Radha was apparently not very willing to take any more chances of meeting Krishna. On the old woman assuring her that they would be going most of the way by boat and there would not be any risk of meeting any undesirable person, Radha acquiesced.

When Baṛayi and her contingent arrived on the bank of the Yamuna there was a boat, but no ferryman was to be seen near about. After waiting for some time for the appearance of the ferryman the girls set up a long call, and forthwith Krishna appeared in his boat. But the boat was too small to take them all over in a single trip. They had to be rowed over in batches of two or less. Krishna managed to take over Baṛayi and other girls and leave Radha for the trip with him alone. Krishna, as expected, demanded river toll from her before he could take her on board and as she would not or could not pay he demanded love. Wrangle ensued as

before and ultimately Radha got into the boat with her goods. When the boat had gone some distance from the bank, Krishna managed to founder it. As water was not too deep the boat was readily righted. In the meantime, Krishna had his satisfaction and Radha did not demur. When they reached the other bank Radha had no difficulty in explaining her untidiness. The loss of her commodities, however, was made good by contribution from the other girls. Before returning home Krishna gave back her ornaments he had taken away. Radha's husband became sorry for her and she was not allowed to gō to Mathura until the end of the season.

When the rains were over and the autumn had set in, Krishna was again impatient for Radha. On his request Baṛayi came to Radha's mother-in-law and told her that Radha could now go safely to Mathura by the tow path which was free from all hazards. She agreed and Radha was once again allowed to go to Mathura. This time Krishna appeared as a porter. Radha was soon exhausted carrying her load in the burning sun. She hired the porter but did not settle a fee. Krishna carried the load to Mathura and the goods were sold but he demanded love as fee which Radha would not allow.

They came back to Brindaban, and Krishna was made to hold an umbrella over Radha all the way. (There is no information as to how this double duty was finally paid for as there is a lacuna of eight folia in the manuscript.)

Krishna now turned to gardening and orchard keeping. He laid a fine park on the wayside. Baṛayi induced all the Gopa girls, Radha included, to visit his park. Krishna behaved nicely to them but towards the end he took Radha away from her friends and wanted her to make love to him. Radha was not unwilling.

The scene now shifts on to the Yamuna. There was a deep pool conveniently situated. But it was infested by a poisonous snake and could not be used by men and cattle Krishna drove the snake away and made the pool usable by all. Krishna, Radha and the other girls swam in the pool and enjoyed themselves, and for several days. One day Radha lost her neeklace in the pool and thought that Krishna had taken it. She sent Baṛayi to get it back, but Krishna denied any knowledge of it. Radha then came to Krishna's mother Yasoda and complained about his misbehaviour.

Yasoda took her son to task. Krishna was determined to take revenge on Radha.

He armed himself with a magic bow and magic arrows made of flowers and stood ready under the Kadamba tree by the wayside to Mathura. When Radha came up there, accompanied by Baṛayi, Krishna demanded an apology from her for making false charges against him to his mother. But she was still in a rebellious mood and would not listen. Krishna lost his temper and shot at Radha. As the arrow struck Radha, she crumpled up and dropped senseless on the ground. Krishna did not expect this effect and he felt panicky. Baṛayi was angry and she held him responsible for an unprovoked murder of a young girl, and she stopped him from running away. Krishna was not so much afraid of punishment by law as of ridicule from the ignominy of being held up by an old woman. He humbly asked Baṛayi to set him free, and promised that he would try to revive the girl from her fainting fit. Baṛayi released him. Krishna came over to Radha and mourned piteously.

'I shot only on the advice of the old woman who arranges our meetings. But why does she have to die and make me a woman killer? You did speak ill of me to my mother, but all that may go now. Radha, do you come back to life? Why are you in such deathlike sleep? Listen to me, foolish girl, wake up and hearten me, my lovely Radha. Just listen. My good girl. I entreat you, do please get up. I shall write off all taxes due, and promise not to give you any further trouble on any occasion. Get up and be moving to Mathura with your goods for sale in the market there.'

Krishna sprinkled on her face some cool water from the Yamuna and presently she came to. Then he made her drink some water. When Radha was fully in shape, he left quietly.

The magic shot had overpowered her by a load of love. Radha could no longer stay away from Krishna. She went after him. After a great deal of search she found him in the park. The lovers were reconciled.

Krishna had given his word that he would not molest Radha anywhere in public. And he kept his word. But as he did not say anything about mental disturbance he did not hesitate to torment Radha at her home. Now he prepared for himself a fine, melodious flute and played on it anytime he liked. The pervading and

penetrating sweetness of the notes did not fail to reach Radha confined in her home, and it tormented her. She at last spoke to Baṛayi:

'Who is he plays on a flute from somewhere near the Yamuna?
Who is he plays from somewhere near the pasture field?
I feel washed out in body and tired in mind;
the sweet notes from the flute disturb my cooking.
Who is he that plays on the flute?
Who can he be?
Would I throw myself at his feet as a slave
O Baṛayi, who is he that plays on the flute in wanton abandon?

What wrong have I done to that person?
I cannot check tears.
The sweetness of the notes, Baṛayi, is killing me.
It is that only which disturbs the peace of my mind.
Krishna, the son of Nanda, plays so divinely on his flute.
Had I been a bird I would have flown straightway to him
Let the earth open a fissure so that I may hide myself.
O, Baṛayi, when a forest is on fire the world knows;
but my heart is being consumed in (the slow fire of) a potter's kiln
Desire for Krishna is scorching my heart.
(So) sings Chandidas with his head bent low to Basuli.'

Radha asked the old woman to find Krishna for her. Baṛayi expressed her inability to do so and advised her not to indulge in adulterous love. But Radha was inconsolable, she would go herself. So the old woman was compelled to accompany her in search for her lover. But they did not succeed.

On the night she had no sleep as Krishna was playing off and on. When the old woman called early in the morning she found Radha in a dead faint. She threw cold water on her face and she revived quickly.

Baṛayi now was really sorry for Radha and resolved to have it out with Krishna for maltreating the girl. She cast magic charm on Krishna and brought him to sleep on the spot under the Kadamba tree, his flute fallen by his side. Radha took away the flute and

threw into the pitcher of water she was carrying. When Krishna came to he missed his flute badly. But he did not take much time in coming to the conclusion that Radha was in the secret of the theft. When charged Radha stoutly denied, but Krishna was insistent and he was profuse in supplication. It was finally agreed that Krishna could get back his flute if and when he would humble himself and make the promise to Baṛayi that he must never behave contrarily to Radha. Krishna was agreeable. Baṛayi took Radha back home.

Months pass but Krishna does not meet Radha. It was now early spring. Radha was at the end of her patience. She was constantly entreating the old woman to go out and find Kr̄ishna for her. Baṛayi repeatedly pleaded inability to do so. She was too old to make long and uncertain journeys; the whereabouts of Krishna were not known to her. Radha offered her some gold as compensation for her troubles to find Krishna for her. She mentioned all the likely and unlikely places in and around Brindaban and also some far off places[1]:

'If you do not find him at any of these places, you may go to the banks of the Ganga and seek there. If you do not find him there you may then go to the house of Sagar (or at the house on the sea) and ask closely the cowherd Sagara (or at the cowpen on the sea). If you do not find Krishna there you should ask each and every man in the street, and then you will surely get information as to where the lord of the universe (or Jagannatha) is.'

Baṛayi replied that she could not travel so far out. Radha asked her to go at least to Mathura where she was sure to catch him. Baṛayi reproved her for her past behaviour to Krishna, but Radha only talked about her present woes Baṛayi could not resist Radha's importunity and she took the girl with her and went out in search of the truant lover. They came to the Kadamba tree, Krishna's most

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[1] The following lines make a strong suggestion that the author (of these lines at least) implies an identification of Krishna with Chaitanya. 'Bhāgīrathīkula', 'Sāgarera' and 'Jagannātha' are not without some significance. Chaitanya was born in Nadia on the bank of the Ganga; he lived in Puri in a garden house near the seashore where he was known to all; on his demise he was supposed to have been merged in the image of Jagannath there. This would indicate that the work cannot have been written before 1534 A.D.

favourite seat for relaxation, and waited there patiently.

The day wore out and the night drew near. Radha was still waiting tearfully, talking with the old woman about the past and bewailing the present till the night wore out and the next day dawned. Baṛayi then took her to Brindaban where they came upon Krishna busy in herding cattle. It was too much for the poor girl; she fainted away, but Baṛayi soon brought her back. Radha humbly confessed her guilt in flouting him in the days gone by, but Krishna would not listen to her and he talked in a supercilious manner. Radha said again and again : "Allow me only to sit by you." Krishna replied; "Do not come closer, people may talk. You just listen to me from where you are. I know for certain that dark days are really come: you should not think of adultery with a nephew of your husband." Radha said : "Just for once you keep my face. Make love to me just for once and save me."

Krishna replied : "I have become a yogi now. Day and night I contemplate only yoga, and I keep the mental activity and the vital process at a stand still. I drink honey from the lotus root; and that is how I am now in possession of the knowledge of Brahman. Temptress Radha, go away. Your love is in vain. Ira, Pingala and Susumna (the three central nerves) I have made to join together, and mind and breath have been made fast within. The tenth door is completely shut. I an now on the path of yoga. The arrow of love is superceded by the arrow of true knowledge, and so I am now beyond all allures of your youthful body. I am immune to attractions of the flesh. I find everything on the earth worthless." With these heart-breaking words Krishna sat quietly in the posture of a yogi. Radha said that now when Krishna was a yogi she would better leave home and serve him as his companion and personal servant as a woman yogi (*yoginī*). Krishna could not meet this point raised by Radha, and he took the plea that he was not an ordinary yogi but an *avatār*. Radha did not care to comment on this claim of Krishna but she went on with her request that just for once he should make love to her. Krishna ignored it and recounted her offences in the past. Radha said if Krishna would not make love to her she would court death and put the blame on him. Krishna now relented and said, "Very well, only if Baṛayi approves." There was a further talk between them until the old lady interfered. Baṛayi at first would

not support her but was ultimately prevaïled upon to do so. When Radha was trying to get Baṛayi take up her issue, Krishna, unnoticed by them, had made himself scarce. The two women were again on foot and after a fatiguing search they came upon the sage Narada. When asked about Krishna's whereabouts the sage sat down and thought deeply in yoga, and then told them they could meet Krishna in a bed of flowers at the foot of Kadamba tree in the depth fo the Brindaban woods.

They made a bee line for the spot and saw Krishna from a distance. The sight was too much for the exhausted girl, and she fainted away. On coming round presently Radha sent the old lady to Krishna to tell him about her condition and ask him to do the needful. Baṛayi came to Krishna and reported the pitiful condition of Radha in a paraphrased translation of two relevant songs of Jayadeva : *ṣtanavinihitam api hāram* and *nindati candanam indukiraṇam anuvindati khedam adhīram*. Krishna gave her a patient hearing and then, with a smile said, "Let her come properly dressed for the occasion and sit by me. I'll do good to her."

Radha came up as told, and Krishna felt a surge of overwhelming pity for her. They met and forgot everything. Presently Radha, tired and spent out laid herself down to rest on a couch of dry leaves and placed her head on Krishna's lap. She at once fell in deep sleep of exhaustion. Baṛayi was all the time keeping away at a distance but she was not fully out of sight. Krishna beckoned to her to come up, and as she drew near he said, "I have done as told by you. Now bid me goodbye. The day is drawing to a close; you should leave the woods at once. I have kept my word given to you, and you must now keep my request. I am leaving Brindaban for good, and you are to take care of Radha." As he said this Krishna gingerly laid down the head of the sleeping girl from his lap and left for Mathura.

Radha woke up and not finding Krishna by her side cried. She exhorted the old lady to go out and bring back Krishna to her. Baṛayi said it was now late and dark and they should better return home quickly. She added that as they were reconciled, Krishna would certainly meet her in the morning. Baṛayi managed to take the girl home.

Days came and went but not Krishna to Radha. The summer

ended and the rains set in. Radha urged Baṛayi to go out and look for her refractory lover. She lamented :

"The Kadamba trees are bent low with the load of their
blossoms, still the young cowherd does not come back.
How long should I keep my jutting breasts concealed?
My hard-hearted lover did not leave a word for me.
Baṛayi, tell me who has disturbed our love from our
childhood days.
The lord of my soul does not come home to me.
Baṛayi, I will rub off the vermilion paint from my forehead
and will break into smithereens my conch-shell bangles.[1]
Separated from Krishna my heart is aching all the time;
I am like a doe suffering slow death from a poisoned dart.
The other Gopa girls, fortunate all, live happily;
I know not why fate has given to me so much suffering.
By day and by night I think only of Krishna and his charms
But my heart does not collapse, as it is made of hard stone.
The month of Jyaistha is out and the month of Asarha is
now in; dark clouds are piling up high in the southern region.
Even now the cruel son of Nanda does not come.
(So) says Chandidas a member of the host of Basuli."

Baṛayi advised her to have patience for the next four months as travelling would be very difficult for her. Radha said that it would be impossible for her to live so long without meeting Krishna once at least. She added :

In the months of Bhadra the sky is overcast and it is dark for me day and night; peacocks, bullfrogs and snipes are never quiet. If I do not meet Krishna my heart will collapse. The clouds are cleared off the sky by the end of the month of Aśvina and they are replaced by the blooming Kāśa tufts in the fields. Then my life will be completely meaningless to me.

She urged Baṛayi to go to Mathura where Krishna was likely to be and gave her a ring she was wearing (as a sure message to Krishna

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[1] Wearing vermilion paint on the forehead and conch-shell bangles by a woman signify that her husband is living.

and as a fee for the old woman). Reluctantly Baṛayi agreed.

Baṛayi came to Mathura and met Krishna, but Krishna told her clearly that he was no longer in love with Radha. Krishna politely asked the old lady to go back home without further ado. Baṛayi did not like Krishna's tone. She said : "I fail to understand your attitude. You are refusing a nectarine drink offered unasked and free. The poor girl will never again be contrary to you. Do have some faith in me and come back to her. If you do not act as I say you are sure to repent in future. There was a time when a good dinner did not mean much to you. Why are you now keen to eat grit? A gold pot, broken, can be easily mended, and so is the love of a good man. A bad man is faithless, and his love is like an earthen pot. Radha is there in her own home, you are here at Mathura and between you two I, a worried and weary old woman, am coming and going like a shuttle-cock."

Krishna was moved but his attitude did not change. In quiet tones he reiterated his position. Another meeting with Radha was inconceivable as her harsh words, although spoken long long ago, were still rankling. He had left the cowherd settlement ("Gokula") for good, and he was now set on the removal of Kaṃsa.

The manuscript ends here and the rest of Krishna's speech and the subsequent matter carried over the next folium or folia are lost to us. But its gist may be understood from the matter of the impromptu play which Chaitanya arranged at the house of his uncle-in-law Chandraśekhara (vide *Chaitanya-bhāgavata*).

The Problems posed by Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan Reconsidered

Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan is different from any other old Bengali poem in its tone of coarse love and overtone of real warmth jarred at times by obscentity. This in the Krishna legends is tacitly accepted by scholars as a strong evidence in favour of its antiquity. But why should it be so? Jayadeva's songs are nowhere near such coarseness, and Bhavānanda's *Harivaṃs'a*, another narrative lyric on the love of Krishna with Radha and other Gopa girls, beats *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan* hollow on this count. Jayadeva belongs to the twelfth century and the date of Bhavānanda's work cannot be put back beyond the first half of the seventeenth century. But there must have once existed a work, in Sanskrit, Bengali or Avahattha, which recounted in any scale short or long, the erotic dalliance of God playing the part of a cowboy. It is referred to by several writers on the topic, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is clearly mentioned in Bhavānanda's poem, and it is clinched by the name of Bhavānanda's poem. (However it is quite likely that none of the writers mentioning such a work named *Harivaṃs'a* had ever seen it.) Bhavānanda belonged to north-east Bengal and his poem, consisting, like *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan*, of lyric songs but unstringed by Sanskrit verses, were quite popular among Muslims in Sylhet and Chittagong. The manuscript of *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan* was recovered from the heart of the district of Bankura in the extreme south-west Bengal but we do not know where the manuscript was produced. As we have said before, there are some jottings on the margins revealing three signatures of Muslim persons and an undeciphered line in the Persian script. This proves that the manuscript was once in the possession of Muslims.

There is nothing in the script or the language of *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan* to give a definite indication of the region of its origin.The script shows no definite local variety except that *ra* (র) is almost always represented by the stabbed variety (ৰ) which is a characteristic of the Assamese and north and east Bengal script. The language

presents some glaring affinities with Assamese but many more with Oṛiya.

At a first glance the grammar of the language of *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan* would convince the reader as being older than in any other known work with the certain exception of the Caryā songs. But all the same, there are difficulties in assigning an early date if all the features of phonology and morphology are taken into account. There is unmistakable evidence of lateness and modernness in language and diction.There are not a few Arabic and Persian vocables including one or two words or mixed Persian and Indo-Aryan origin. The orthography is archaic but it fails to cover up articulations that are definitely late. There are not a few forms that definitely reveal vowel harmony, which phenomenon did not appear before the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century.

A third difficulty is encountered when the Sanskrit ślokas are taken in consideration *vis-á-vis* the Bengali metre. The Sanskrit ślokas give the running outline of the story and the Bengali songs supply the entertaining embellishment. Many of the ślokas are quite good and the writer was not a bad poet. An earlier form of the poem seems to have consisted of the Sanskrit ślokas acting as links between songs. It was probably a developed pattern of *Gītagovinda* but the songs are not in Sanskrit. Viewed in this light *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan*, as it has come down to us, is considerably mutilated by omissions and alterations and grossly overlapped by additions.

Sometimes a supporting song (or songs) is not there; for instance the first section ("Janma-khaṇḍa") ends in two ślokas requiring at least two supporting songs. The most luscious sectian, "Dhāna-khaṇḍa", is not only inflated too much but is superimposed by at least two slightly differing versions. Superimpositions are seldom unclear, and there are also not a few definite contradictions. For instance, in the last section ("Rādhā-viraha") we are first told that when Radha lay sleeping, her head on Krishna's lap, the latter came over to Baṛayi[1] who was at a distance and spoke to her about his intentions, and then when he had said his say he

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[1] "baṛāyir pāṇe kānha karila gamana" ('K, came over to B'.)

gingerly removed the head of Radha from his thigh and left the place of Mathura.[2]

The division of the peom into sections does not seem to be exactly original. At any rate there was some reshuffling and rearrangement which pointed out later an incompetent editing. For example, what had once been the 'Yamunā" section ("Yamunā-khaṇḍa") was later loosely split up into three separate sections, Kaliyadamana, Yamunā and Hāra. The entire "Vṛndāvana" section is probably one of the latest elaborations or interpolations done rather ineptly.

A fourth difficulty is offered by the signature known as "bhanitā" of the poet appearing at the end of each and every song. The name appears as either "Caṇḍīdāsa" or "Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa" (the ratio between the occurrences being roughly 2:3), or, in six occurrences, as "Ānanta (*or* Ananta) "Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa" and once as "Ananta nāme Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa". The name Ānanta is fairly distributed in the poem and it does not seem to be a deliberate interpolation. We are, therefore, in all fairness compelled to accept Ānanta as the personal name and "Caṇḍīdāsa"/"Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa" either as a sobriquet or a professional title or the poet or the redactor. (If there was a redactor I would hazard a guess that this was the same as Ananta Achārya, a disciple of Advaita, who composed songs on the Dāṇa episode, eching the tone of *Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan.*)

Now an objection may be rasied here : how can Caṇḍīdāsa be a sobriquet or a professional title? The answer is : as it stands it is actually used as such with the name Ananta (Ānanta). However, the validity of the objection would depend on facts regarding the existence of a person actually bearing the name and not merely on the name itself. What is the guarantee that like "Vidyāpati" and "Vyāsa", "Caṇḍīdāsa" was not also a title or pen-name? We may also compare "Sāralādāsa" of old Oriya poetry. A reverential reference to the goddess Bāsalī (another name of Caṇḍī) is invariably there with the "bhanitā" which literally means "a servant of Caṇḍī". Three typical "bhanitā" lines from

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[2] "thira thira kari rādhār śiyarer uru kānhi" (making slow and soft efforts he removed his thigh from the head of R.')

Śṛīkṛṣṇakīrtan are given below.

gāila baṛu caṇḍīdāsa bāsalī gaṇa[1]
('Sings Baṛu Chandidas, a retinue of Bāsalī.')
gāila baṛu caṇḍīdāsa bāsalī bara
('Sings Baṛu Chandidas, a chosen follower of Bāsalī.')
gāila baṛu caṇḍīdāsa bāsalī gati[1]
('Sings Baṛu Chandidas belonging to the host of Bāsalī.')

Now let us consider the "bhanitā" lines containing the proper name Ananta or Ānanta.

māthāe bandiā bāsalī pāe
ānanta baṛu caṇḍīdāsa gāe
('Touching the feet of Basali by the head
Ānanta, a Baṛu (and) Chandidas, sings.')
ānanta nāme baṛu caṇḍīdāsa gāyila
devī bāsalī gaṇe
('Ananta by name, a Baṛu (and) Chandidas, a retinue of Bāsalī, sings.')

If we accept Ananta as the personal name, "Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa" may be easily explained, and the explanation would also throw some light into the original nature of the poem and the occupation of the poet. The word "Baṛu" meant a play-actor or a senior member of a family or of a professional group and "Caṇḍīdāsa" means a man serving as a professional in a temple or establishment dedicated to the deity Caṇḍī/Bāsalī. In an Old Oriya inscription dated 1271 A.D. there is mention of a family group of dancer-actors ("naṭuvā") attached to the temple of Nrisimha at Simachal in Kalinga. The senior member was the eldest ("baṛu") brother. We may suppose that there were such groups of dancer-actors also in Bengal in the centuries after Jayadeva (who undoudtedly presided over such a family group), and one such group with Caṇḍī as their tutelary deity ("Bāsalī-gaṇa") was known as "Caṇḍīdāsa" from the usual "bhanitā" of the songs sung by them in their performance of Krishna themes. The song (also the poem ?)

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[1] "The words "gaṇa" and "gati" may also mean 'way, path, deliverance'. I have taḳen "gati" as derived from Sanskrit *gotrika* (belonging to a 'clun').

was composed by or in the name of the elder or senior member ("Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa") whose personal name was Ananta, and this Ananta probably handled an ancestral repertoire. It is not inconceivable that such a "Caṇḍīdāsa" school had their headquarters at Kānaināṭśāl near Gaur where Chaitanya had seen their performance on his way back from Ramakeli.

As there is a suspected reference to Chaitanya in the "Rādhā viraha" section noticed previously, as well as other points beside the linguistic traits indicating a comparative lateness, we may hold that the performance witnessed by Chaitanya and the songs known to him, did not come from Ananta but from an ancestor or predecessor of his who may have been the original or the first Chandidas.

The discovery of two very late manuscripts one dated 1830 A.D., not loose leaved but sewn like books, among the manuscript collection of the University of Calcutta in the early thirties of the century, created some flutter among the "Chandidas" scholars. The manuscripts were really workbooks of some learner of musical beat. They contain some twentyseven little changes, in *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan*. The remaining ten might have easily belonged to the missing portions of the poem. The two manuscripts were among the collections made by the discoverer of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan*. The discovery proved that the songs of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* were not really unknown up to the first few decades of the present century. The discovery dealt a blow to the theory that *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* is an isolated relic from a hoary past and is not linked with the later Vaishnav Kirtan activity. However, it supports the fact, although no one noticed at the time, that the manuscript of *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* is not really as old as it is considered to be, and its paper, ink and calligraphy do not make it older than the middle of the eighteenth century, which date is also supported by linguistic evidence.

I have already mentioned that some stray couplets from songs of Chandidas, even from *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan*, were current as refrains ("dhuyā") in the eighteenth century. In older Kirtan anthologies also there are a few songs which might have originally belonged to the poem by Chandidas. I quote below one in translation. It is incorporated in Narahari Chakravarti's *Gītacandroday* (compiled

in the early eighteenth century).

'The lover is a pillar of virtue ; your name rolls in his tongue.
If your name reaches his ears he exudes pleasure.
He averts his face, as his eyes fill up with tears.
If one asks (anything) he only turns his hand.
I tell you what you must do. Do not think otherwise.
He is at the end of his patience. Says Baṛu Chandidas.'

Epilogue

From the discussion made on the preceding pages I hope I have been able to indicate that "Caṇḍīdās" is a name which is legitimately applicable to several persons diachronously as well as synchronously.

Diachronously there were at least three poets bearing the same name and existing prior to the nineteenth century. One was the old Chandidas appreciated by Chaitanya and his friends. Another was the Brahmin ("Dvija") Chandidas a disciple of Narottam Das. The third was a tantric Vaishnav who produced little poetry but perhaps was prolific in mystic songs. The third Chandidas was probably the same person and used the sobriquet "Taruṇīramaṇa" in some of his Kirtan songs on the love of Krishna.

There were others, hack writers and forgers, who produced heaps of rubbish with the "bhanitā" of Chandidas the humble ("Dīna"), or Chandidas Inferior ("Hīna") or Chandidas the Lean ("Kṣīṇa") or Chandidas the Humble and Lean ("Dīna-Kṣīṇa") or, of course, simple "Chandidas". The "bhanitā" is often their only justification for appearance in print and therefore, for "serious" consideration by some scholars for a time.

Synchronously there was a "Caṇḍīdās" group ("gaṇa", "gati") we may say a school of poets, singers, dancers and/or mimics and puppet players, who had a repertoire of dramatic songs on the love of Krishna with Radha (and other Gopa girls). The original form of that repertoire that has come down to us in the form of *Śrīkṛsṇakīrtan* was probably like Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* or perhaps more like Umapati's *Pārijātharaṇa* (but not in the frame-work of Sanskrit drama), where dramatic and lyric songs were strung together in a chain of Sanskrit slokas running through and carrying ths story forward. The poet was known as Chandidas but we are not sure whether it was his personal name or an appellation.

The first Chandidas was a good poet and so was also the second. We are not in a position to say who was the better of the two. With an apology to an unknown admirer of Kalidasa I would

like to say finally :

eko'pi jīyate hanta caṇḍidāso na kenacit/
śṛṅgāre vrajalīlāyāṃ caṇḍidāsa-dvayi kimu//

'Even a single Chandidas is second to no other name
What of a pair of Chandidases in matters of love in the Vraja?'

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Among the sweetest flowers of Old Bengali Vaishnav poetry are the lyrics ascribed to Chandidas. But who was Chandidas and what was he, where did he flourish and when—are questions that have baffled the most assiduous research by reputed scholars of Bengali language and literature. The earliest reference to Chandidas is to be found in *Chaitanyacharitamrita* wherein Krishnadas Kaviraj, a junior contemporary of the Master, records that in his later years Chaitanya received emotional sustenance from the songs of Jayadeva (in Sanskrit), Vidyapati (in Maithili) and Chandidas (in Bengali). That would give the approximate date of Chandidas somewhere between the later part of the 15th and the early part of 16th C. Date apart, the multiple identity of Chandidas and the stories associated with his *alter egos* make a most fascinating reading. Dr Sukumar Sen, a recognized authority on the history of Bengali language and literature, has dealt with all such questions with a scholar's acumen and a narrator's delight. Dr Sen is inclined to favour Baru Chandidas to be the one to have ranked with Jayadeva and Vidyapati—as his detailed examination of the *Sri Krishnakirtan* shows. Finally, he holds the scale between Baru and Dvija and says : *Even a single Chandidas is second to no other name / What of a pair of Chandidases in matters of love in the Vraja?*

Cover : Facsimile reproduction of Ms. pp of *Sri Krishnakirtan* with Chandidas's name on *bhanita*.



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